

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T BONN 09836

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, WB, US, UR, UK, FR, GW, GE
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ABRASIMOV'S EVIDENCE ABOUT ALLIED
FLAG TOURS

REF: USBER 1507

1. WE ARE INCLINED TO BE SOMEWHAT LESS SANGUINE THAN
REFTEL ABOUT THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE SOVIET DEMARCHES
AGAINST ALLIED FLAG TOURS IN EAST BERLIN WILL DEGENERATE
INTO A SERIES OF PETTY EXCHANGES ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF
THE TOURS.

2. WE HAVE BELIEVED SINCE THE BEGINNING THAT THE SOVIETS
DID NOT WISH TO CREATE A PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION AT THE
BERLIN WALL UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. THEREFORE, WE
THINK THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ALLIED PATROL
VEHICLE BEING STOPPED AT CHECKPOINT CHARLIE IN THE NEAR
SECRET

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FUTURE.

3. NONETHELESS, WE ARE ACUTELY CONSCIOUS THAT THE
SOVIETS HAVE NOW RAISED THIS ISSUE FOUR DIFFERENT TIMES
IN CAPITALS AND AT THE AMBASSADORIAL LEVEL. WE DO NOT,
THEREFORE, BELIEVE THAT IT WILL GO AWAY. EVEN THOUGH
ABRASIMOV STEPPED BACK FROM MAJOR THREATS TO A RATHER

UNEVEN SERIES OF CHARGES AGAINST THE CONDUCT OF ALLIED PATROLS, THE VERY FACT THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE RAISED THIS ISSUE REPEATEDLY SUGGESTS TO US THAT WE NEED TO REMAIN ON THE ALERT.

4. WE WOULD DEFER TO MOSCOW'S ESTIMATE OF PROBABLE SOVIET BEHAVIOR. OUR JUDGMENT, BASED ON ONLY THAT ASPECT OF SOVIET PERFORMANCE WHICH AFFECTS US HERE, IS THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT LET THESE ISSUES SLIDE AWAY UNLESS THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY PERSUADED THAT TO PURSUE THEM WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE LOCALLY OR UNLESS THE OVERALL INTERNATIONAL ATMOSPHERE IS SUCH THAT THE SOVIETS DECIDE TO DEFER AN ISSUE AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. MOREOVER, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THEY ARE SIMPLY BUILDING A RECORD ON THE BASIS OF WHICH THEY CAN CHALLENGE US MORE EASILY IF AND WHEN THEY DECIDE THAT THEY WISH TO DO SO.

5. ON THE BASIS OF THIS ESTIMATE, WE BELIEVE IT REMAINS ADVISABLE FOR US TO CONTINUE TO PURSUE OUR CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND TO BE READY FOR SOME SORT OF SOVIET-GDR PRESSURES, AT LEAST IN THE FORM OF HARRASSMENT OR FURTHER SENIOR LEVEL PROTESTS. IN ADDITION, WE BELIEVE THE SUBJECT REMAINS SUFFICIENTLY CENTRAL TO OUR OWN INTERESTS AND POSITION IN BERLIN THAT WE SHOULD KEEP REMINDING THE SOVIETS, AS APPROPRIATE, THAT WE WOULD REGARD INTERFERENCE WITH THE PATROLS AS A SERIOUS BURDEN ON OUR RELATIONSHIP AND AS A VIOLATION OF THEIR BERLIN ENGAGEMENTS.

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